

Book 1: Revelations of the Past

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***Chapter 1*: Nightmares**

Hey everyone! I decided I would redo the first 3 chapters (don't worry, they won't change dramatically, like switching out Maria for a guy, or something). You'll still see a lot of the same things, but the story will be better this way. Or at least it will in my eyes. So, I hope you enjoy this newly edited Chapter 1! (I had gone through this a few times, and was actually going to go through it again, but then I decided if I kept going over it, I was never going to get to posting it, so I decided, "Just post it already." So, here it is!)

(Grr... This won't let me make smilies...)

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Sol Adept Chronicles

Book 1: Revelations of the Past

Chapter 1: Nightmares

A small, frantic figure was running like her life depended on it, her breath coming in quick, frightened gasps.

Thana had to get away.

She would be in trouble if she didn't make it.

Thana's hurriedly-packed sylph backpack bounced a little as she made an effort to put the straps a little tighter to could gain more speed. She glanced fearfully behind her, face covered with sweat of exertion and fear. She ran, buildings from the city streets looming like mountains beside her.

Even though she tried to stay hidden by them, she felt afraid of every shadow, every bush, every building. The enemy could be concealed in anything! She must not be caught. If she was, she would have failed.

She could not allow that to happen.

Thana tried to pick up her pace. Her home was far behind her. Her goal- far away. She couldn't lose her speed, or her focus. If she did, it was over.

She ran behind a giant magnolia tree a couple minutes later to catch her breath, trying to hide within the black shadow of the huge leaves and the huge, sweet-smelling white blossoms. Nervously, she glanced around her, checking her bearings.

She saw nothing, and she held a good position, from the look of it.

But things weren't always as they appeared. Her assailant was very quick, and very cunning. They might use their knowledge of city layouts or of her to gain an advantage. She had to put as much distance between the stalker and herself as possible!

Leaving the safety of magnolia tree, Thana took off again, fleeing to the shadows and silently screaming her anger out at the full moon. Not only was it giving more light that could possibly give away her position, but it was also making her feel... woozy... uncomfortable. She could never explain why she felt that way on nights with a full, or almost-full, moon, but for as far as she could remember, she always felt real jittery and almost... drained, similar to Kyo reacting when it would rain. Except it nights that decided to cradle a full moon on its blanket of stars were what bothered Thana, not rain.

Thana picked up her pace again, and felt the wind rushing by her, blowing her short, red-gold hair away from her eyes and cooling her hot, sweaty body. Her glasses slid a little; she pushed them back up, and then risked a quick glance down at her watch.

10:47 PM.

It's almost time! She thought excitedly. *Just a little longer....* She ran even faster, the knowledge giving her more strength.

Maybe I can lose them even more! She thought, seeing an alleyway, but took too sharp a turn and didn't look. She tripped over a slab of broken concrete, knocking the wind out of her for several moments. In her panic she could've sworn she heard footsteps approaching, and picked herself up and ran, forgetting any feelings of embarrassment immediately. Her pursuer had gained time on her, and she didn't want to be caught!

A dark shadow passed over the alleyway a few minutes later and soon materialized into a form, hovering over the wall overlooking the alleyway. It seemed to just wait there for a few seconds, watching as the small figure leaving the alleyway began to disappear into the following darkness. It waited until she was almost invisible in the darkness before participating again in the chase, like a predator playing with its prey.

Thana was off and running again, adrenaline burning through her veins like acid being poured onto a long strip of paper. She scarcely noticed the wild beating of her heart or whether she was entering the city's outskirts or core. Her

only thought was that she needed to evade her pursuer, and in any way permissible.

Jumping down from a roof as silently as a cat, she ran some distance and then climbed up a stone wall. Balancing precariously on barely 6 inches worth of foot-space, she took off again, running carefully along the backyard wall of the dark, new (under construction) housing development before entering the downtown business district. There were very few streetlights here, so Thana decided to leave the shadowy wall for darker shadows. The shadows were good, and she had nearly run out of wall, anyway.

She landed next to a fence near a Watermill Express. Fleeing to the fence's shadows, she stayed so close to it she could feel tiny splinters from the boards pressing up against her skin. Thana was beginning to breathe in quiet, gasp-like breaths. She would have to be careful of how much she exerted herself, or she might find herself with an unneeded asthma attack.

In a brief moment of light, she fearlessly risked another glance down at her watch.

10:54 PM.

Yes! She thought. *Almost!!*

She skirted the sidewalks and, after across a short bridge, jumped down to a lower walkway. She landed. A soft thump sounded behind her, causing Thana's hair to stand on end.

Her heart racing, she swung around without thinking to look behind her. A swish of long hair from the less-dense shadows was all she saw before she felt a sharp blow from behind. Her eyes clouded over with darkness.

"Hah, caught you! You *almost* escaped me- nice try!" was the last thing she heard before the world closed in around her.

The wind roared angrily, nearly bursting Thana's eardrums as it whipped her hair around her face. She felt the ground tremble beneath her feet and stood precariously, trying to maintain a sure footing, since she was standing near the edge of what appeared to be the top of a mountain. She could feel a dark cloud hanging ominously in the air; she shivered; the feeling chilled her.

Where am I? She wondered, and then the answer appeared before her. Oh, I'm in a dream. She was about to dismiss the thought, when another came to mind. Hey! Wait a minute! Did that mean I failed-?! Her thoughts were interrupted when a commotion attracted her attention.

A group of people stood at the center of the mountain peak.

Deciding to figure it out later, she slowly and curiously wandered over.

There appeared, in her opinion, to be a wide variety of cultures, because after every few people, the next set looked different. In the center, there was a muscular man with flaming orange hair, gripping the hilt of the sword at his belt. In front of him, several feet away, there was a woman. She had waist-length, slightly-wavy flame-colored hair that looked like fire when it danced in the wind. Almost like my hair, but WAY totally longer, Thana thought. She seems cool. Her hands were bound behind her back with shackles that seemed to pulsate with energy. Two men were supporting her by her arms; she was so beaten that she was unable to stand, and there were cuts and bruises all over

her slim frame. Er... maybe not. Thana thought, as an afterthought. She seems pretty beat up. But what jerk goes around beating up girls?

She turned to a couple of people that were nearest to her.

What's going on here? Thana asked aloud.

No one seemed to hear her.

Hello, peoples! Thana said, waving a hand in front of the face of the one nearest to her.

They didn't seem to be able to see her, either.

I'm just a silent observer in another weird dream, I guess, Thana mused to herself.

Suddenly there was a shout from the other side of group. A name was called.

The shout came from a man with long, bluish-silver hair and... the head-piece thingy the Lemurians wore, Thana thought. This dream's getting weirder.... Why am I seeing Lemurians? Unlike the woman from the other side, he was just restrained. He was struggling to free himself, but his slimmer physique than his captors' was no match for the vice grips of the two that held him. He shouted again in a tongue that Thana couldn't translate, and called the name again.

This time the woman responded, murmuring something that Thana couldn't understand, softly in a despairing tone, and not lifting her head. The man began talking to her, telling her something, but it seemed to call her attention, because she raised her head to look at him. As their eyes met, a fire

sprang into the woman's eyes. She started to reply, but before she could finish, she was cut off.

This is like watching TV in a foreign language you're trying to learn... *Thana concluded.* You don't understand what's going on until you finally learn it!

It was the orange-haired guy in the middle that had cut her off, and then began speaking to them about something in an emotionless tone. His eyes were shut tightly; he was gripping his sword so tightly that the whites of his knuckles showed.

It's kind of like he's regretting what he's about to do, *Thana thought, trying to figure out what was going on by analyzing the character's voices and actions.* But I couldn't figure out what's happening in the first place....

The man continued, his voice shaking with pain, and his fingers loosing their grip on the hilt of his sword. He opened his eyes, staring blankly at the ground, and his hand fell from the sword to his side.

The woman murmured something to him in a questioning, scoffing tone. The center man's head shot up, his voice shaking as he tried to retort an answer. She raised her head, this time stronger and more confident as she pressed on. The center man cut her off, his eyes narrow and blazing. He whipped out his sword. Face like a stone mask, he barked something angrily and signaled to the men holding her. Their hands began to glow. Sparks of electricity and flame crackled around her. She began to scream. The blue-haired man cried out her name in anguish, struggling even more earnestly to free himself. The man in the center advanced.

No! Not again! *Thana thought, shutting her eyes as though to push away the images. She knew what was going to*

happen next.

The woman would die.

She knew the procedure of this story already, but every time she saw it she felt the pain anew.

Suddenly Thana felt a surprised feeling of nothingness.

Hey, Thana thought. This has never happened before-

And then there was pain. Burning, slicing, piercing pain. Thana's screams rose with the woman's as she felt herself feeling the woman's pain.

What happened...? Thana's mind was filled with that single thought. Then, like the morning dawn after night, the realization was there.

She was inside that woman.

Somehow, somehow, she had been thrown inside her.

Suddenly she tasted blood in her mouth as she felt the sword penetrate her heart. With difficulty, she raised her head, looking into the hate-filled eyes of the man from the center, his sword impaled through her. The woman, and Thana, spat something painfully to him before the agony intensified. The blue-haired man ceased struggling. Tears poured down his fair cheeks like rain; helplessness stealing his face as he was forced to watch her die. The man from the center spat something disdainfully, looking down at the dying woman as Thana felt her begin to fade away. Blood dripped down, the stream becoming a pool around her feet. Thana couldn't even describe the intensity of her pain.

But then Thana felt a greater anguish within the woman, not a another physical wound, but a great sorrow from within the woman's soul as she released her final cry-

Thana awoke screaming, the images replaying themselves before her eyes as strong as they had been when she dreamt them.

A/N: What do you think? Better? Worse? Please R&R!! And I'm still working on Chapter 4, nobody panic! I just needed to add in the revisions, but I thought that if I was going to add some changes in the previous chapters, now would be as good a time as any. Besides, I think, really, that (pardon the pun) Chapter 1's the one that's really going to have the most changes. So, in theory, it shouldn't be long before I get the next 2 done, and then I'll be able to post Chapter 4 when the revisions are done:D That's my plan anyway. Well, please R&R!! Thank you so much!!

***Chapter 2*: Tell Me of Your Dream**

Hey! Here's Chapter 2 edited! Some grammatical stuff fixed, some extra stuff added. I'm happy/happier with it. :) So, here's Chapter 2, and please enjoy!

Chapter 2: Tell Me of Your Dream

Thana screamed, thrashing around the bedcovers as she fought regaining consciousness, still fighting her dream. Hands shot out to control her. She fought against them too.

"Would you stop fighting me too, Thana?!" a voice shouted out heatedly. She barely heard though; her mind was a haze.

Slowly, Thana opened her eyes, and ceased her struggle. Panting heavily and sticky with sweat, she glanced around. Her heart was still pounding in her ears, but it was beginning to subside as she took in her surroundings. She was her family's sick room, lying in one of the hated white hospital beds. The walls, too, were bright white, and the air smelled so sterile Thana nearly gagged. She glared at the walls darkly, reminded once again of her dislike of it.

Thana grimaced inwardly. The sick room had been an aspect of her house, or rather, home, since her home was basically a mansion stuck out in the middle of the woods, away from the city. (She had to walk a few of miles to get to the bus stop for school, if Maria couldn't drive her over in the morning.) The house was pretty old, with a lot of old architecture that Thana preferred to ignore. Most of the rooms smelled musty from being closed all the time, and clean was a nice luxury in the house. Her parents weren't home all the time due to their work, but cleaning was still

managed in the parts of the house that were lived in. Cobwebs always seemed to be welcome, though, despite their efforts, adding to the ancient feel of the home.

Everything seemed to be old, even the sickroom, which was added during either the Texas Revolution or the Civil War (sometime, she didn't know which or if it was even then) to serve as a military hospital. Thinking about the likeliness of laying on beds that people had died on (her parents tried to convince her that the beds and sheets wouldn't have lasted that long, but she didn't fully believe them, going on the fact that they still HAD the sickroom) always made her feel sick, which didn't help to speed her recovery and get her out of there. It just made her hate the room even more.

A figure was looming over her, hands holding Thana down by her shoulders. She looked up apprehensively, but relaxed when she saw it was Maria, her 16-year old sister. She began to smile in relief, but it was quickly replaced by a cringe. She didn't even want to look. There were several scratches on Maria's left cheek, and a few were deep. Two of them were deep enough that blood just seemed to ooze down in a small stream, while the rest allowed just a few droplets to form, albeit slowly.

"Sorry, Maria," Thana murmured, her eyes downcast in the knowledge that she had to have done it.

"You'd better be," her older sister replied darkly. Then, apparently satisfied that Thana was conscious now, Maria released Thana's shoulders. She plopped onto a chair that was next the bed, sighing heavily. There was silence for a moment between them, then Maria walked over to a medicine cabinet and, pulling some bandages, disinfectant, and a washcloth, began to clean her cuts.

Thana sat up. She still felt a dark cloud clutching at her heart, even though she wasn't held anymore by the caging bars of her nightmarish vision. She pulled her knees, along with the bed sheet, up to her chest, and wrapping her arms around them, laid her head on her knees. Her face burned with shame. She had never injured her sister before, not even unintentionally, and she felt miserable along with the darkness around her heart.

"Well?"

Maria was looking at Thana, having finally finished bandaging her incisions.

Thana was silent.

Maria sighed. She should've known that Thana would've been like that- brooding in silence and letting her sister play a guessing game at what she had seen until she was ready to talk... She sighed again, inwardly frustrated.

Deciding to try and help improve the mood (which also might increase Thana's chances of opening up), she turned and walked to the opposite side of the room. She opened the window to let some fresh air and sunlight in, the alarm beeping once as she proceeded. The warmth would do them both good, she decided, looking at the statue-like figure on the bed.

Sensing Thana wasn't going to open up any time soon, Maria decided to try again.

"Well?"

There was still no response.

Maria pushed some of her bangs back with her hand, rolling her eyes as she did so. She couldn't keep it up forever, could she?

"Well, what?"

Maria perked up. She spoke! Thana was still staring despondently at her knees, but at least there was some improvement.

"There's going to be lifetime scars and it's my entire fault, isn't it?" Thana murmured. "I'm really sorry, right? I-"

Maria gave a grateful sigh. "I'm fine," she said, giving a smile; and, walking back to where Thana's bed was, stopped in front of it. "Look."

Thana lifted her head slowly, and looked at her sister. Her eyes grew wide at the sight of the size of the gauze bandage. "I'm sorry, Maria!" she exclaimed. "I'm sorry! I-"

Maria gave a small laugh. "I already told you. I'm fine, alright? I've already forgiven you, but I can take it back if you want me to," she said, her voice increasing slightly to rise over Thana's continued apologies.

Thana fell silent. "No," she whispered. "Thank you. I am sorry, though." She looked back down at her knees.

Maria walked over to the side of the hospital bed. "Well," she said, sitting down in the chair again, "before we begin a long conversation during which I will eventually pry out of your tight little lips the contents of your new dream, would you like to know how you fared?"

"How I-" Thana began, then stopped. "Oh. Did I fail this time? Please don't say I failed!"

Maria sighed. "That's a slightly difficult evaluation, but since we had just bumped it up to a medium level of difficulty, I'll try to go a little easier than normal for you. But first of all, what kind of running was that?! I told you to run like Death itself was chasing you with a scythe! That didn't look like run-for-you-life fleeing to me!"

"I was trying, Maria! Honestly!" Thana protested, her eyes bright in earnest. "I almost did it, too! But there's a difference between telling myself that over and over and having it actually-"

"Okay, point taken," Maria interrupted with a wave of her hand. "But that still doesn't excuse the fact that you gave me your position numerous times during which I could've caught you easily and the fact which you weren't alert enough to avoid me for another 4 minutes of the allotted time. The last four minutes out of 2 hours? Come on, Thana. You got too excited over almost completing it for the first time and got cocky."

"It was just four more minutes?!" Thana banged the mattress with her fist, muttering a small curse under her breath. Maria looked over at her with a "Did I just hear what I thought I heard?" countenance, so Thana hurriedly continued before any comments could be made against her. "How easy is four minutes, huh? Why do we do these dumb exercises anyway?" She crossed her arms in front of her chest, muttering something else against the exercises.

"Because these are survival exercises that our family instated," Maria reminded quietly, "and they just might save your life someday, when you are old enough to know the reason why."

"Oh, come off it, Maria! I'm 11 years old, for crying out loud, and nearly 12! How much longer am I supposed to wait to know?!"

"When you turn 12 and show signs that you are ready to learn, then you shall learn," Maria said. "Until then-"

Thana's eyes lit up like a flashlight. "Really?" she interrupted. "Just 12? A few more weeks?"

"12, and you show signs that you are ready to learn," Maria reiterated. "And until then, you have to suffer with these exercises that will only get harder once you reach 12, but I expect you will be a little more appreciative then. I'll forgive your criticism for now, however."

"Okay," Thana said, itching to know more but knowing she was going to get any more out of Maria. "Anyway, did I pass or fail?"

"Well...." Maria let it hang in the air. "Considering that it was your first time, but also considering that you only had another 4 more minutes out of 2 hours, I'll pass you at a 70, but first thing tonight you're going right out there and-"

"Thankyouthankyouthankyou!" Thana shouted, hugging Maria tight. Maria held her in return, muttering something about "like Felix".

When Thana finally let go of Maria, she looked up, asking, "But what did you mean by, me constantly giving away my position?"

Maria chuckled to herself. "I'll give you a chance to ponder on that yourself. You have 5 minutes to consider it, while I, if I have permission to, look in your bag and see, out of interest, what you decided to take?"

"Go ahead," Thana muttered absently, already focused on figuring out what went wrong.

Maria reached down and pulled Thana's backpack out from the side of the bed.

"Let's see..." she murmured, interested to see what her little sister had taken with her. She opened up the flap. Laptop...? charger...? sketchpad...? drawing stuff...? wallet with ID and pictures... pen drive...? necessities... snacks... money... radio... compass... couple of books...? roadmap... mp3...? batteries...? GBDS with Golden Sun and manual...???

"Okay..." Maria said finally. "Most of this stuff I can see some sense as to why you think they're important, but what's with the Game Boy DS, Golden Suns, manual, and mp3? And some of this other stuff in here? Won't that be mostly dead weight?"

"Never know what might come up. Besides, in a Slyph backpack, you don't feel a thing," Thana said absentmindedly. "And who knows what might happen?"

"Yes, who knows what." Maria looked down at the stuff, still confused over some of the stuff that Thana chose for the exercise. She was about to ask about a spare change of clothing, but Thana's mind had already left the room.

The exercise, which was meant to train a person on their "get-up-and-go" skills, involves a person discovering they have 5, 10, or 15 (depending on difficulty level, here listed from hardest, medium, and easiest levels) minutes in which to grab anything of necessity and escape the house within the allotted time. (If they don't make it, it means they were captured by the enemy they were trying to escape and have to start over.) Then, they have to hold out for either 3, 2, or 1 hour (listed from hardest to easiest level again) without

getting 'captured' by the enemy, who was usually played by a family member. It didn't matter where the escapee went or how they did it, they just had to make sure they weren't caught. Thana, unfortunately, got caught, and would now have to keep trying until she could do the full allotted time without getting caught.

Maybe it was dead weight that was another reason she got caught, even if was a Sylph backpack...

"Hey, Thana?" Maria piped up.

"Hm?"

"I, er, notice you didn't pack any spare clothes," Maria said. "Any particular reason why...?"

"I did," Thana replied. "You just didn't look well enough. Remember my bag's modeled after Alexa's bag? Besides, I put on my 'trick' clothes, so I really don't need a spare set for anything besides a clean pair. My disguise angle's covered. Surprised you didn't notice right away."

"Oh yeah..." Maria realized as she checked the spare compartment at the bottom. She had taken some spare clothes after all, huh...

"Alright! I got it!"

"You figured it out?" Maria asked. "In the words of Train Heartnet, 'Color me impressed'!"

"Yes, I have figured out that... I can't figure out what I did wrong!!" She looked up at Maria pleadingly. "Please, tell me what I did wrong!!"

Maria covered her face with her hand in mock shame. "So you haven't figured out what you did wrong?"

"Err... no."

Maria looked up, and pointed at Thana's wrist with a sigh. "Your watch, *sonso conejo*. Every time you had to check your watch, in order to get light on your watch to see, you also caused light to be reflected off of it. All I had to do was wait until it was almost time for the exercise to be over, because as it neared the end, I knew you would checking it more in anticipation, and it wouldn't take that much effort to find you."

"You mean, you found me because I kept checking my watch?!" Thana was dumbfounded.

"Yep, that was the big secret. And, for the next time, if you really want to know what time it is, double back by the bank or somewhere where they have the time announced, because you have to stop letting that habit be used against you. And, as a matter of fact," Maria began, pointing at Thana's light-colored clothing, with the exception of her jean shorts and black vest, "you need to wear darker clothing, because even the moonlight, without the help of streetlights, you stuck out like a sore thumb. And those white shoes, man, dirty them of something, because you're practically glowing in the night, sis."

"Aww, man!" Thana pulled herself into a ball, moaning. "And I thought I had outsmarted you really good...!"

"Heh, almost, kiddo," she replied. "However, you're going to have to raise the bar a little bit if you hope to pass the medium level with flying colors."

Thana just moaned again. Her hopes had been shot.

"Hey, don't get too down, kiddo!" Maria said hurriedly. "You'll get another chance tonight, and besides, you passed, didn't you?"

"I guess," Thana said, looking up again.

"Good, I'm glad that you're not too disappointed." Maria smiled, and Thana smiled back, then was about to lie back down on the bed when Maria spoke up.

"Now, on to other matters."

"Like what?" Thana asked.

"You had another dream, didn't you?" Start the guessing game, because here's where Thana locks up tighter than a clam.

Thana turned her head, nodding slightly. Yep, definitely tighter than a clam.

"Was it the same as last time?"

She shook her head.

"This one was different, then?"

Thana nodded, hiding her face between her knees in the bed sheet.

"Was it different from that the nightmare with the hooded figures? The woman or the man again? Premonition? Or was it just another bad dream?" Maria asked, leaning over onto the bed rail and tipped the chair on its front pair of legs. This might take a while, so she "might as well be comfortable".

Thana gave a quiet moan from within the sheet.

"How bad was it?" she asked, inferring the meaning of the moan sympathetically.

Thana mumbled something unidentifiable, and then fell silent.

"Was there anything to do with those hooded figures?" Maria asked, deciding to try and decode her sister's present form of communication. "Two of which you said...who was it? I think you said were like Saturos and Menardi? I told you and will say it again: don't go to sleep thinking about Golden Sun..."

"But it wasn't them..." Thana interrupted, then went silent again.

Thana turned her head a little, trying to gather her thoughts, and stared out the open window to a vibrant bird in a nearby tree. It was preening its feathers and singing cheerful notes as it worked. Thana watched it, and listened to the outside sounds, breathing in some of the fresh air that was finally entering the room with a feeling of serenity. Several more birds landed on other branches. She heard the whisper of the wind as it blew through the trees, rustling the leaves playfully and making the flowers and the tall grass dance to its rhythm. The sunlight shone brightly through the window, reflecting around the room and warming her soul, giving her strength. She felt a feeling of gratitude as the shadows of her vision were finally departing from the recesses of her mind, allowing her spirits to lift as she watched nature at work.

"It just felt so... real," she finally murmured, watching the birds as the feeling of peace continued to steal over her.

"Some dreams do," her sister replied.

"But this one felt more that," Thana continued. "Yes, there were people, but there were more this time, much more. One did have blue hair, but he was human. The woman did have hair similar, but different, to Menardi's, if you need an example, but it wasn't her, although I could've sworn she might've been a Proxian..." Her voice trailed off.

"Well, obviously you didn't go into convulsions just because you saw two people," Maria said. "And you did mention there were more. Did something occur because of them?"

Thana gave a nod. "It was like I could feel everything that was occurring," she murmured slowly. "I could move and think, like in any other of my dreams, and yet... it almost felt like it wasn't me that was fully dreaming it."

Maria looked at Thana, confused. "It was you, yet it wasn't you? What do you mean?"

"Well," Thana said quietly, thinking of a proper wording. "It was just... I could feel all the emotions: all the anger, the fear, the hatred, the pain. I was in tune to everything. That's why it felt almost like it wasn't me that was dreaming it, but rather someone else sharing it with me, and filling in all the details so I could understand what was happening, to some degree."

"Well, haven't heard of anything like that before. At any rate, it's interesting," Maria said, taking a mental note, and then spoke up before Thana would say anything more. "But you never answered my question. What happened? What was so scary?"

Thana squeezed her eyes shut for a moment, trying to block out the images that had sprung up in her mind to haunt her once again. "They killed her, that woman I mentioned," she finally whispered in a quiet voice, as if it was destroying her

just to say it, "in a long, tortuous process, that which I felt every moment of, and the heart-wrenching despair and anguish of the other as he was forced to endure it all-" Her voice cracked and wasn't able to continue on, instead burying her head between her knees again as she tried to shield herself from the images replaying themselves in her mind. She let out a soft, scream-like moan as she held her held with her hands.

Maria reached over and placed her arms around Thana, rocking her gently as her sister began to shake with uncontrollable sobs. "Shh, it's going to be fine," she murmured, trying to comfort Thana. Glancing out the window to the empty tree, she sighed. Death and torture were the worst types of things for Thana to emotionally deal with. Poor thing... she still hadn't completely recovered, whether physically or mentally, from what she had experienced as a younger child. Something like this just brought back memories of her past, which were very painful for her, as much as she had tried to forget it. No one should've had to have gone through that, or anything else of that sort for that matter....

Suddenly, Maria stiffened as she felt a chill run down her spine. She felt Thana respond to her sudden motionlessness questioningly. Maria tried to sort out what her instincts were trying to tell her. Usually, it was what she was hearing, but now, it was what she *wasn't* hearing that bothered her, she finally concluded. Maria looked outside the window again, hesitantly.

The bird was gone from the window, as were all the others, and the wind had stopped its rhythmic call. Everything had gone silent and still, like soldiers standing at attention, and everything was watching, waiting...

Maria waited with abated breath-

A giant explosion shook through the house, knocking Maria to the floor and nearly pitching Thana headfirst off the bed as the explosive did its job. Maria, shaking, reached for the metal bar on Thana's bed to pull herself back up, and felt her blood run cold. Smoke and voices were carrying up the hall, and the sound of entering footsteps echoed through the house. However, throughout the entire clash, one harsh, guttural shout rose above the others:

"Find the Adepts and bring them to me! We cannot fail the Master, so do not let them escape!"

If it were possible, Maria surely felt herself go as pale as the smoke that was sweeping into the room.

A/N: So, better this time around? Does it flow better? Hope so, and I hope you enjoyed it! Please R&R!!

Long live summer vacation!! Oh yeah!!!

***Chapter 3*: Run, Thana!**

Hiya! This is the last redo chapter before I upload Chapter 4 (which will be in a few minutes, hopefully). So, please let me know if you think this is better than the one before. I think so, at least, and must say I'm happier with it. It's less talkative and flows better. So, please R&R!!

Disclaimer:I do not own Golden Sun or any or it's copyrighted themes or characters. But I do own whatever I create. They're mine! All mine! So back off! (brandishes a sword) Sic 'em Luna!

Haha... Sorry, couldn't resist... Enjoy!

Chapter 3- Run, Thana!

Maria felt her skin go paler than the smoke that was sweeping into the room. Coughing as she breathed some in, she unsteadily pulled herself up with one arm using Thana's bed rail. Panic surged through her as she consciously realized the fumes of smoke, and she frantically proceeded to pull Thana out of the bed. She desperately needed to get her sister out of there. If either of them got an asthma attack-! But she didn't want to think about it- she couldn't even afford a moment to think. In this present situation, an asthma attack needed to be the least of her worries.

"Hey-what-who-?" Thana protested and questioned at once, but failed in her attempt to stay in the bed until she got a full explanation when she suddenly lurched forward, coughing and wheezing from the smoke. Maria used this window of opportunity to pull Thana out of the bed.

"There isn't much time to explain, but the fact is we need to get out of here!" Maria interjected before Thana could question, pulling out her spare inhaler from her back pocket and stuffing it into Thana's mouth. Her sister grabbed it and pressed it, releasing the medicine.

Thana gulped in a shallow breath that contained the medicine, her chest still heaving as she tried to inhale it. A few seconds later, her convulsions began to subside, and Thana was breathing easier. The medicine was working, and the smoke was beginning to filter out of the room through the window with the breeze.

Maria breathed a sigh of relief.

Thana lowered the inhaler. "Thanks, Maria," she murmured gratefully in a tired voice.

"What a day, huh?" Maria said. Thana gave a quiet laugh and nod in reply, shakily leaning against the bedrail. Maria's eyes dropped down to the floor as she looked down in exhausted relief. Suddenly Thana gave a small tug at her sleeve. "What is it Thana?" she asked, raising her face to look at her. She stared at her in confusion.

Thana's eyes were wide, fear filling her bright orbs as she looked directly beyond Maria.

"What's-" she began as she turned around, but never finished her sentence.

She was looking right into the center of the barrel of a gun. And it was aimed right at her and Thana.

"Well, well, "the owner of the gun drawled in pleasure. "What a surprise...*Maria and Thana Walker.*"

"Romano, you traitor," Maria hissed. "I should've guessed who you sided with after the commotion you caused at Easter!"

"Always the Master, my dear Maria," the man replied smoothly, lowering the gun ever so slightly. "Besides, since I acquired the powers of the Dark after joining with the Master, could I stay in this family of Light?"

Romano was a tall, lanky man in his early twenties, a few years older than Maria, with browned skin. Too much time in the sun, Maria figured. He was dressed in a military uniform that held a new insignia upon his shoulder. He was carrying rifle in his hands, and had a smaller pistol at his side. Drumming his fingers slightly against the rifle, he continued. "Here we came prepared for an army of Adepts, and we find two little girls cowering in fear all alone. This will be easy. The Master will be so pleased."

Maria rolled her eyes visibly at the remark, and then commented sarcastically, "New insignia, I see, Romano. Your Master actually came up with something almost original? Wow, it's gonna snow in June."

"Laugh while you may," he sneered, "because very soon you won't be laughing at all!" He suddenly raised his gun, aiming at Maria, and began to pull the trigger. Her eyes went wide. Her arms moved instinctively and pushed Thana behind her.

Suddenly, Romano swerved the rifle toward the ceiling, releasing three consecutive shots, and pausing slightly after each.

Maria looked on in confusion, straightening slightly.

Romano laughed as he lowered the gun. "All I did was relay the signal for a few soldiers," he said. "Did you really think I was going to shoot you?"

"Yes, I did," Maria spat, not sharing in his humor.

"The Master ordered us to bring you two in *alive*, my dear. You should've known by now that Thana, or you for that matter later on, are no good to him dead," Romano said. Soldiers entered the room in rapid succession. They now stood behind him, assembled and with their own rifles at the ready.

"W-what do you want with us, Romano?" Thana whispered, pushing herself out from behind Maria. Her quaking voice betrayed her attempt to sound confident at addressing her step-cousin.

"Oh, the midget speaks," Romano laughed in mock surprise, as Maria pushed Thana behind her again. "You see, my little one, my Master has some need for the two of you, but your family, and your sister here, have been most uncooperative. Do you understand, or do you need me to explain what I just said in, say, little words?"

"No, I don't!" Thana spat, trying to push herself past Maria again. She had a furious look in her eyes that clearly said she wanted to kill him. She hated being treated any younger than she was, just because she was one of the younger members of the family.

"Ah, a fighter spirit," he said aloud. "Good. Our Master will have some use for that."

"Like I'll go with you either!" Thana spat. "And I'll say this openly: I may have no idea who you are or what's happening, but I trust my sister's judgment, and I've

decided I don't like you either! Nyah!" She stuck her tongue out at him.

Romano's vein popped in annoyance. "Brat," he muttered, then added, "how about I teach you a lesson in manners?"

Before Maria could react, she felt a hard blow to her stomach, and then another to the side of her head that knocked her to the ground. Eyes blurry with stars, she looked up. Romano stood in front of her, holding her sister up by her collar. Thana was struggling against him, but her strength wasn't strong enough to do anything to even annoy him.

"Put me down!" Thana shouted, but Romano stood unfazed.

"Now," he said dangerously, cocking his rifle up at the Thana with his free arm. "You have a choice. You can both come willingly, or I shoot your sister, right here, and right now. The Master may have said to bring you all in alive, but what I failed to mention was that it didn't have to be in your... best health."

Maria didn't believe that she could've gone any paler.

"Your choice," Romano repeated.

Maria desperately searched her mind for an option.

"There is a way to save your sister," a soothing, familiar voice spoke in her head. *"But will you allow me to help?"*

"Alright," Maria murmured. She had promised herself it wouldn't come down to that, that she couldn't reveal it, at least not while it was only her to explain it to Thana before it was her time. But her options were beginning to look slim. And Thana's life was at stake. Maria had to make up her

mind now. How much was she willing to risk by not using her powers? Thana's peace of mind? Or Thana's life?

"What was that?" Romano questioned.

Maria had promised her parents that she would protect her sister from danger while they were gone. That was a promise that she intended to keep.

Leaving indecision behind her, Maria quietly stood, brushing the dust off of her.

"I said, alright. But I wasn't talking to you," Maria said, giving a sly smile. She calmly raised her arm above her head.

Romano suddenly looked nervous. "Y-you wouldn't-! I-I mean it! I'll shoot your sister!" He desperately raised the gun closer.

Maria didn't seem to hear. Thana watched her in confusion. She could feel the air pressure changing, and could've sworn she smelled rain the air. But how could she? It had been completely sunny several minutes before...

She glanced out the window.

Angry thick, black storm clouds gathered in the heavens, blotting out the sun and making the day as dark as night. The wind shripped hysterically like a madman, ripping through the trees with the strength of gales. Lightning seared through the sky to the land, tearing at the ground and anything in its path, before quickly followed with monstrous peals of thunder that seemed to rent the sky itself to two. Thana felt the earth beneath her begin to quake in terror.

"What happening?" Thana murmured, but her voice was lost in the raging voice of nature.

"Shut your eyes, Thana! Now!" Obediently, Thana followed the mysterious, if somehow soothing, voice.

Suddenly, a brilliant white light tore through the room, blinding everyone within but Thana, and she was dropped the floor as Romano tried to shield his eyes from the light. She quickly picked herself off the floor, looking incredulously at Maria for an explanation.

Maria returned the look with one of relief and said, "I'll explain later. At the present, we are in heap of trouble, and I have to get you out of here." Thana murmured a "what?", but Maria didn't notice. She just tossed Thana's backpack to her for Thana to put on. Then she was looking hurriedly around the room, trying to find a solution.

Her solution arrived on four furry feet, pushing the door slightly ajar.

Maria eyes lit up. "Luna! There you are!" she called, as the sleek, silver long-haired cat ran into the room, jumping on Thana's bed. Her blue lamp-like eyes stared up at Maria, and she heard the familiar, this time more urgent, voice say in her head,

"Mistress, you must take your sister and get out of here, now! The enemy is close at hand, and more will be here any moment!" Her blue orbs shone imploringly at Maria.

"I know!" Maria replied. "But there's too many! There's no way to get both of us out of here unnoticed without-" and, suddenly, an idea dawned on Maria. A crazy one, but it was her only hope.

"Luna, you take Thana and lead her away from here. Grab Sol, and Mars if you can find him. Just make sure you can get her to safety. I'll create a distraction, so you all can escape."

"No! You cannot die, mistress! What are you talking about?! We'll find a way to all get to safety..." her voice trailed off. "...Or did you have another vision and did not tell me about it?" she asked, quietly.

"I'm sorry, Luna," Maria murmured, softly nodding her head. She looked at Thana, who was still standing beside her, now wearing her backpack. A look of confusion was still on her face, and new confusion forming as to why she wasn't undergoing another attack since there was still smoke in the room.

"But Thana..." Maria paused, then continued. "She has a long journey ahead of her. But I... I did not see myself along her path. Not until much later down her journey. My heart ached at my inability to be there for her no longer, but that is the path that has been laid down for us, and that is what will come to pass no matter what I try to do to prevent it. For now, I must do all in my power to be her stepping stone on her way to her journey." She looked away, tears glistening in her eyes. "Please, Luna. Protect Thana with even greater power than you watched over and protected all of us with! Whatever happens, don't let her die!" she begged the small cat on the bed, her eyes full of desperation, as if that might also have been seen in her unspoken vision.

"Alright, Maria," Luna replied softly. "As you wish."

Slowly Luna rose, and jumped off the bed. She hurried over to Thana's side, who was now standing beside Maria. Thana was looking up at her with great confusion.

"Maria, what's happening?" she asked, her younger eyes filled with worry. For a brief moment Maria just looked at her younger sister, then grabbed her into a tight hug.

"Promise me that you'll take care of yourself, all right?" she whispered, urgently.

"Um, okay," Thana said. "But why are you saying this like its good-bye? Aren't we going together? Wherever we seem to be going? I still don't know what's going on..."

"Two-second explanation then," Maria said, speaking fast. "There are a bunch of dangerous intruders inside the house, and I have to get you out of here. They're after us, but at the worst-case scenario, I'd rather they catch one than both, so I'm going to ensure that you escape. I know you don't understand why, because our family was so stingy over not being told until it was our time, but someday, perhaps we can sit down and have a long talk about this. For now, the intruders'll be here any second, and you need to get out of here. Escape through the window. Luna will look after you. Just think of this as that exercise you wanted to redo. And if you can survive this, I'll pass you with flying colors, because there won't be a 'try again' button if you lose this time, I'm sorry to say. And don't worry. Luna is a good... watchcat, for lack of a better term. Practically a guardian angel."

"Just trust us, Thana," Luna said. "I can protect you."

As if in justification, Luna jumped into Thana's arms, looking up at her with her glowing blue eyes. Thana looked skeptically at the cat, still not even believing that the thing in front of her just spoke in her mind, but thought better of questioning that at a moment.

"But what about you? Aren't you coming too?" Thana asked, the sudden realization racing into her mind.

Maria gave a grim smile. "No, kiddo. I promised our parents that I'd protect you, and protect you I will, even if it costs me my life."

"No!" Thana exclaimed. "No, Maria! Let's go together!"

"Someone has to make sure you get out of here safely!" Maria shot out, interrupting Thana, who backed down a little at the sudden outburst. "But don't worry," Maria hastily added. "We'll see each other again."

"Promise?" Thana asked in a tiny voice.

"I promise, sis," Maria replied, giving her a tired smile. "Now, will you trust me?"

"All right."

"Then head to the window. Once there, exit, and make a beeline for the woods. Just follow Luna. She'll guide you to safety," Maria said. "Oh, and take these as well."

Thana reached her hands out grasped three bracelets- one with golden beads, the second with blue beads, and the last with red beads. Though all of them had a larger bead that matched the color of the bracelet, these different, larger beads all had a different symbol on them, but she couldn't figure out what they meant, and, being a moment where every second might count, she didn't try.

"Okay," Thana murmured tinily, and was about to head to the window when she stopped, and threw her arms around Maria. "We must meet again," she whispered, trying to bolster her courage. "Or how can we ever see each other or our family again?"

"That's right, Thana," Maria said. "If we fail in strength, then we'll think of each other. That'll give us a reason to continue on." She paused, and undid Thana's arms. "Be strong," she whispered, "and don't give up. Don't give up."

Thana nodded, then turned and walked toward the window, then, looking back once, exited, and then took off running into the storm that only seemed to build, Luna hot on her heels. Then, a golden cat, followed by a brown one, ran out from the undergrowth, and followed them, like guardians in the night. Maria said a prayer for Thana's safety, then turned to concentrate on her own as she murmured one for her.

"I never thought I'd have to do this again," Maria thought, as she placed her hands in front of her. The feeling of her power surged through her, and a blue-and-silver staff appeared, with a knife to her side. She grabbed them, putting the knife in a strap at her waist, and then held the staff in front of her, stilling her quaking hands.

Her clothing had changed, too. She was no longer dressed in her t-shirt and jeans, but in a flowing, white dress and a blue-and-silver robe, the hood falling gracefully about her shoulders and neck, edging slightly into her upper back. Just above her hips lay a long fabric-like belt with a circle-shaped buckle balanced on her left hip, portraying a glowing, crescent moon which enclosed opal, sapphire, and white gems, which in turn were all inlaid inside small, glowing star-shaped outlines. The ends of the belt dangled loosely down her side. She wore tight arm warmers that stopped just before her elbow and at the knuckles and a leather arm, wrist and palm guard on top of them. Her boots, brown leather that went right below her knee, were inlaid with interwoven silver at the top and right above the foot.

She was in her Adept Guardian form, allowing her more strength than she would have had in her normal Adept form. This one, like everything else, she had been required to keep hidden from Thana after being taught, until it was her time to learn the secrets of their family, their Adept family. Like she had done a few years before when her powers manifested. But Thana's powers were not yet ready by the family's standards, and thereby she couldn't learn of everything until that happened. She felt sorry for having to send Thana away still knowing nothing, but her family was strict that way, just like with the training exercises they had to put up with.

However, there wasn't much time to mull over that now. There was a job to do.

"Well, to battle," she murmured. "And to whatever awaits us."

A/N: Well, what did ya think? Please let me know. Thank you:D

***Chapter 4*: Up a Creek Without a Paddle**

Hey y'all!! Happy 4th of July!! Yes, finally back with the 4th chapter. (Hey, 4th of July and this is the 4th chapter! Neat!) However, work-wise, that's not quite that long for this one if you take into consideration that I redid Chapters 1-3 (and they sound so much better in my eyes, plus I also reuploaded the 3rd chapter a couple of hours ago), uploaded another poem for "Golden Sun Poems", and reposted my Fruits Basket story, "The Legend of the Butterfly". But then again, the last time I uploaded was March... Um... Well, the 4th chapter's here, anyway. :)

So, if you get the chance, please go back and reread the first 3 chapters, and let me know if they do make more sense now or not. I'm really hoping so, but I won't really know unless someone tells me, so I really hope that you'll do that favor for me. Thank you so much:D

I think I'll leave the rest for the ending author's note. :)

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Chapter 4- Up a Creek Without a Paddle

Maria stood overlooking the living room, poised on the second floor balcony and hiding behind one of the wall extensions. She glanced around the corner. There didn't seem to be as many troops as she had originally thought. The commotion with Romano seemed to have thrown off her judgment on the scale of the attack. However, she had learned to expect the unexpected, and thereby not to judge

only by appearance. There had to be more hiding from her view, for the element of surprise.

Maria growled under her breath, frustrated at the whole thing. Why did Mom and Dad have to choose this week to be absent?! she complained to herself yet again; then, after a moment's pause, pondered the benefits of attacking during a time like that. They had to be after Thana... well, maybe her, but she was sure that Thana had to be first on their agenda. 'Everyone' else was out of the house, so they couldn't have been after him... And it wasn't like their absence was a secret in the family, so it could've eventually reached their ears, especially with probable help from Romano. Maybe...? She sighed, confused. She didn't know what their true goal was, and mulling it over wasn't going to help her anyway. She heaved another frustrated sigh. She had to concentrate on the task at hand, not worry about 'what ifs'.

Maria looked up at the ceiling, trying to relax her tense muscles. Closing her eyes to allow some inner peace to enter and calm her restless soul, she prayed for her sister's safety, and for her own. But, Maria knew, that although she was the one that was riding into a battle that probably held grave peril, her sister was the one that was in the most danger. While she could protect herself, Thana's psynergy powers were not supposed to be manifested for another few weeks, and Thana herself didn't even know they existed. *Why* did their Adept family have to be so darn strict?!

While Maria was fighting her own personal war, Thana was running steadily along the back side of the house, the strong wind whipping her short red-gold hair back and forth, like a small fire. She was grateful that she knew about the secret hole in the wall that separated her home from the woods.

She felt ingenious, like she had outsmarted the enemy that had decided to invade her home.

Yet for how high she was feeling mentally, physically speaking, she couldn't have been feeling worse.

She was getting stitches she usually never got, shortness of breath she usually never felt, and tiredness in her muscles that she hadn't felt in a long time! She couldn't understand why she suddenly felt so much weaker.

Her head dropped a little as she felt her muscles tightening before she forced it back up a little higher and desperately tried to regulate her breathing. She was inhaling in gasps and she felt her chest tightening. Her neck and leg muscles were cramping bad. That shouldn't have been happening to her in the first place!!

Then, to top things off, she felt a sharp pain in her chest.

She finally stopped, Luna, Sol, and Mars stopping beside her.

"What's wrong, Thana?" Luna asked concernedly.

"I don't know," Thana responded automatically, before she could think. Then, as she was thinking about how she must either be going crazy or having a really bad dream, Luna said, with almost a smile:

"Don't worry. I am perfectly real and you are not going crazy. However, this situation is perfectly real, and while it may be strange to you, it can be explained later. Plus- oh! Sol and Mars arrived!"

*"Yes, we've arrived," Sol grumbled, pausing in front of Luna.
"We've been here since a few minutes ago!"*

"You did?" Luna asked, acting innocent.

"Yes, we did!" shot back Sol. "We heard something was up and came straightaway!"

"Yeah, and there are some scary looking people attacking," inputted Mars. "So, where do I start firing fire?"

Luna almost chuckled. "No, Mars. We're not here to fight. We're here to protect Thana, and this isn't a good time for her to be going weak. I think you-know-what's beginning to manifest prematurely and no one simply noticed." (Unlike Maria, she was a bit more stringent with the family rules.)

"Are you sure?" Sol asked, looking concerned. "I know that should be a good thing, but this isn't a good time for the changes to be occurring."

"I know, but there's nothing we can do," Luna replied. "Besides-oh, no, Thana!"

Thana had never known what a seizure was, but she was sure that whatever it was, it was probably on par with it. Her breath was coming in ragged gasps and wheezes. She clutched at her burning throat, as though it might help her force oxygen down her air passages. She could feel her heart pumping wildly as she began to panic. She couldn't quell her shaking body. Her breaths were slowing, and Thana began to panic. Then she realized what she had feared.

It wasn't a seizure.

It was a really bad asthma attack.

"Hurry!" Luna cried to her. "Get your inhaler!"

Still struggling to take one full breath, she jerkily reached into her pocket and yanked out the inhaler. Finally, she pushed it into her mouth. Releasing the medicine in sporadic jerks, she hoped she wasn't beyond help.

Nothing happened.

Desperately, Thana tried again to inhale the medicine. She pressed it again, but her air passages still didn't open. Her vision went blurry from the extreme lack of oxygen. She felt herself losing control of her muscles. Her inhaler slid from her hand onto the grassy floor beside her. Dark spots danced before her eyes, followed by a stream of soft, speckled light. She felt herself falling....

Only she never hit the ground.

Seconds before the would-be impact, more light surged before her eyes, and, as if oxygen had suddenly decided it was time to fill her lungs, she could breathe normally again. She caught herself before she landed on the grass, looking down in awe and wonder.

She could hear Luna breathe a sigh of relief. She had never known cats could sigh. Then again, how was she speaking without moving her mouth...?

"I'm glad you're okay, Thana," Luna murmured.

Oh well. Leave it for another time. What had just happened to her anyway...?

Dazed, she slowly stood, then reached down with her left hand to pick up her inhaler, mentally saying a prayer of thanks. As she did so, something caught her eye.

Had one of the bracelets Maria gave her glowed...?

"Come on, Thana, Sol, Mars," Luna said, to each of them in turn. "We need to head to the woods as soon as possible. That's what Maria instructed."

"All right," Thana murmured, turning to the woods. "Let's go."

Maria inhaled a deep final, deciding breath. It was now or never.

She could sense Thana getting closer to the woods, so if she hoped to distract her sister's entrance, it would have to be now. Ah, she thought, a tactic worthy of "The Lord of the Rings"... She'd have to take that up to J.R.R. Tolkien sometime....

Chuckling quietly to herself, she soon stopped, knowing that she couldn't afford to wait any longer if she was hoping to distract their attention from Thana. Murmuring a quiet prayer for strength, she gripped her staff tightly, her knuckles going white. The staff soon pulsated with her psynergy. Smiling at the result, she prepared another dose of her power in her other hand, and leapt out of her hiding place and over the balcony rail, shouting her family's battle cry.

She landed gracefully in the middle of the living room, and right in the core of the enemy troops. Cries of alarm rang out on her existence, but Maria was already dealing damage. Pulses and beams of silver-blue psynergy flew from her palms and staff that they could not see. They watched blindly for a few seconds as they tried to discern what she was doing.

However, they immediately halted their inactivity when they began to feel her attacks. Soldiers were picked up by

unknown forces and then thrown mercilessly against the wall, as more were lifted up and followed suit. Deep cracks lined tore up the wall from the force of the blows. Their bodies were seared and broken with as they were hit by the invisible psynergetic force. Blood dripped and poured down the walls in gushing streams, flowing in rivers on the floor.

The battle had only begun, and more than 20 men fell in the first 30 seconds.

Maria continued to fly like a ray of light that pierced the darkness. The soldiers looked on, frozen with fear and disbelief as she continued dealing damage, moving faster than they could keep up with. She rendered more unconscious with impact alone as her staff became a battering ram, clearing a path through the room as they were flung them against the wall. Bones cracked and shattered from impact.

It had only taken a minute for the large living room to become an up-close Roman coliseum battle royal.

As the fight continued, bodies continued to litter the floor, with destruction now targeting the room and furniture within it. The white floor tiles were now colored a crimson red, staining everyone's boots with the blood of those injured, but had not received enough damage to kill them. Maria didn't like killing. She just injured them so much they couldn't continue the fight, and then she could move them out with a transporting psynergy.

50 soldiers fell before 2 minutes were up. There was no furniture left in their original condition and the floor had cracks lining the once-polished, now-stained crimson tile from the force of Maria's psynergetic rampage.

Now 2 minutes later, the troops finally decided to awaken and fight back. They frantically scurried around, firing their weapons and filling the air with flying bullets and thick smoke. (Luckily for Maria that she didn't have to worry about her asthma in her Guardian form.) If they couldn't see her attacks, they would make it more difficult for her to target them until those that could be on par with her did arrive.

10 minutes and some hundred soldiers later, weariness was long-since begun to set into Maria from keeping up the form and psynergy attacks so long. She had consequently slowed herself down in an effort to preserve her strength. With her agility slowed, the soldiers were finally able to keep up with her for the most part, and hand-to-hand combat was added to the list of activities at the war party. Sweat dripped down the sides of Maria's face as she began to feel drained from the extended time, psynergy, and energy to fight in her other form. She decided to try conserving her psynergy and energy by slowing down a little more, not knowing how prolonged the fight might be and how much energy she may need later on. She could afford to slow down a little more, she hoped.

Even more soldiers began entering the fray, all swarming inside the battle like ants from an upset anthill. She didn't know where they were all coming from. Hopefully some were just a conjured illusion, to create an appearance.... But as a bullet whizzed by her ear, she knew at least some were real.

Maria soon found herself locked in hand-to-hand combat with several soldiers. She dodged knives and swords, along with the bullets from those on the balcony, as she parried those she was locked in battle with her staff and a knife she had managed to pull out during a brief second during the battle.

After several moments of intense attacking and parrying, she finally managed to disarm one with a high kick and sent him crashing into the wall, but in doing so missed the one that had been hiding in his shadow, waiting for an opportune moment to strike.

The moment then appeared like a strike of lightning, and he took it, lashing out with a knife that imbedded her side.

Maria screamed as she felt the blade pierce her body, and agonizingly wrenched the knife from her first wound in the battle. She regretted slowing down so much. She lost herself for a moment in the searing pain and energy began to surround her body. Maria whirled around and heaved the knife back toward its attacker. It sliced through his stomach as it pinned him to the wall.

A second later he disappeared in a flash of light, along with all the ones that had fallen out of the battle. The floor became clear, except for the debris, and she felt the weight of their size begin to lessen.

Gasping for breath, she dodged a couple bullets that were aimed for her stomach, and grazed her arm with one that had been aimed for her heart. A small stream of blood followed the one the in her side, and she gritted her teeth against the combined pain. She could hear the loud impacts as bullets, both aimed for and the ones that missed, were imbedding themselves into the walls. It was then that she finally realized the state of the living room.

Fissure like cracks lined the walls, several of which had gone beyond that and had caved in. The back wall window had been blown out and the glass lay glittering upon the grass with shards of what had been the windowpanes. Half of the wall where the window used to be was completely gone, with

wall plaster littering the tile floor and wood hanging listlessly by splinters, all gone by a psynergy blast that Maria had aimed previously at a large group of soldiers. Mahogany end-tables lay in splinters and ashes beside the walls, and the sofas and love seats were now shreds. The colorful drapes and curtains that used to adorn all the windows had been reduced to less than shreds; they had been completely incinerated. The porcelain lamps were dust and the ceiling fan was sand, leaving nothing but the electrical cords it had once hung on. The tile floor had long, running cracks that spread out like branches on a tree. Some sections of the floor was finer than powder. The ceiling was scorched, and in some sections a small amount of dim light was filtering through small, burning holes. There was a strong wind in the room that was entering from the storm outside.

She had wondered why suddenly it had felt like she had more room to move, despite all the furniture. Now she knew why...there simply weren't any to run into anymore...!

Her parents were *hopefully* just going to bury her alive when they arrived back home... But then again...

She glanced back at the walls.

No way. She was *so* filleted, dead and buried, resurrected, and dead and buried again.

With this depressing thought, she knocked out several dozen more soldiers slightly harder than normal to vent some frustration, and the rampage continued.

"Who claims that a woman can't fight as well as any man?" Maria thought triumphantly a few minutes later, as she caught a soldier with an uppercut and knocked out his front

teeth. He didn't even have time for disbelief, because in the next instant Maria threw a kick to his stomach that sent him sprawling across the floor, unconscious. The number of soldiers out of commission began to rise again, but the number that appeared to enter was rising more.

"I think this is going to get uglier," Maria thought disgustedly, "so, I think it's time to clear the trash. Again."

She activated her staff, causing the jewel to glow, then to pulsate. Swinging the staff around, she caught a soldier in the stomach and flung him against the wall. As she swung, she plunged the staff into the floor.

A bright flash of light encompassed the room.

The light faded. The bodies that had previously lain about the floor had disappeared.

"Nice one, Maria," she thought, complimenting herself before falling back into the pace of the battle. She finished stemming the flow of blood from her side and arm, though they hurt if touched.

Considering that she was the only one up against an entire army, being only a little battered was fantastic.

"Whoa!" Maria suddenly cried out, snapping out of her reverie. She dropped to the floor, narrowly avoiding a slew of bullets that had been aimed for her head.

Quickly, she ducked behind a surprisingly mostly-intact fallen end-table that had somehow survived from Maria's original entrance. She did not feel like becoming Swiss cheese. She barely avoided another onslaught of bullets that became imbedded into the once-polished wooden tabletop, sending up a plume of dust and smoke.

While she was trying to catch her breath, she managed to sneak a glance over the top of the table and caught sight of where the attack was coming from- up above, from the second-floor balcony. Her eyes were full moons as they widened in shock. Was that-?!

"Oh, no!" Maria groaned. "Not machines guns, too!?"

Almost 10 minutes later, Thana found herself in the front of the woods, a broken metal gate, the gate that opened to her family's estate (at least she knew how the enemy got in), to her back, and 3 talking cats beside her and she dressed to run. Beyond the gate and wall, she could see her house from a distance. Her eyes went wide.

The front door had been knocked off its hinges, some of the windows were smashed, and debris littered the yard. Smoke was billowing out of the windows and doorway. Some of the walls had caved in, and she could see a silver blur every now and then from within the house. She could hear yells and shouts from within the ruckus, and wondered if it was her sister that was causing the commotion. If it was, Thana sincerely hoped that she was winning.

The whole front yard was alive with enemy activity. More groups of soldiers were entering the house, while some general-or-some-other-high-ranking-officer-that-was-apparently-leading-the-thing was standing out in front, shouting orders to everyone. Thana eyes narrowed as she looked upon the roundish figure calling the shots in the attack on their home. Her face went warm in anger. Through the building storm, she could almost feel the clouds lighten a little, and the wind picked up a little more. Startled at the sudden increase in light, Thana shrank into the shadows and greenery of the wall, trying to conceal herself. Luckily she

did so, because another group of soldiers suddenly rounded the corner and walked straight toward her.

Thana felt her breath leave her body as she pressed herself closer to the wall and prayed that they wouldn't see her. As she realized herself, she thought about the cats, but realized that they had disappeared somewhere, probably beside her in the undergrowth. Slightly comforted that they wouldn't give her away when they were supposed to protect her, she hoped that these newer people would just walk on by, not noticing a thing...

They walked on by.

Thana sighed in relief, sliding forward ever so slightly.

"Hey, something moved guys!" It was the guy in the back of the group. He was searching the wall intently.

Thana froze, her blood running cold. She couldn't move; her muscles were frozen in fear. She felt like the leaves were rising up around her, making her smaller than she felt.

A guy with sandy-brown hair and a hat that shadowed half his face fell beside him, looking right where Thana was. Thana was sure he had at least seen her, and was also sure they could hear her sweating. "Whatcha talking 'bout, Brian?" he said at last. "There's nothin' there but your wild imagination. Again."

"But I'm telling you, I saw something along the wall!" Brian persisted.

His friend just scoffed under his breath and turned around to catch up to the group. "You're seeing things, again, Brian. You need to get your eyes checked, and maybe your brain

while you're at it..." His voice trailed off as he started walking away.

Brian whipped around, his face flushing. Running after him, he protested, "I don't need to get my eyes checked! Nor my brain for that matter! But I know I saw something! I didn't..." Then the voices disappeared as they rounded corner and passed through the broken gate.

Thana slumped to the ground in exhausted relief. She said a silent prayer of thanks that she wasn't seen, and slowly stood back up. After waiting a few more moments up against the wall, during which she discovered that Luna, Sol, and Mars had disappeared.

"Hey! Luna! Sol, Mars! Where'd you go?" she whispered, but no answer came. Where could those cats have run off to?

She knew she couldn't simply hang around and wait for them to reappear, so she decided to make a break for the woods while the coast was clear. She took a deep breath to steady her racing heart, and then recklessly shot like a hare from her hiding place.

Then, like a jolt to her subconscious, Thana felt someone's presence and a bad feeling. She shouldn't have jolted out, but it was too late to turn back the clock! She tried to pick up her pace, because if they had a gun, which was most likely, it was harder to hit a moving target.

Her eyes began to drift, so Thana let them lead her. They landed on a section of shadowy branches on one of the trees in the forefront of the woods. Nothing, she thought, but then light flashed from within the tree. A dark form was huddled behind a clump of branches, blending in with the leaves. Thinking back to her exercise, the light would've probably

come from a smooth surface, and on a gun, that was probably a scope, so.... She tried to increase her speed.

Her heart began to beat with the tempo of a wild drum.

The sniper rifle followed her a few more feet.

It locked down upon its prey.

A finger inched forward and slowly pulled the trigger.

Time seemed to slow as a muffled shot sounded through the stillness of the woods.

A blood-curdling scream pierced the sky like a lightning bolt from the storm. Then it began to fade, and a deathly silence cloaked the woods like a choking blanket. The trees trembled as if they could feel her pain, while the wind carried the dying cry away on its breath.

A/N: Well, what do you think? Is it flowing okay? Hope so. Please R&R!!! Thank you!!

Oh, also, has anyone solved the coded poem? Rozzlynn, Elf Princess Kiri? Anyone? 'Cause if you have, please let me know. I'm dying to know if anyone has cracked that puzzle yet. If not, good luck to those that are still having a shot at it!!

Also, I have summer homework (yes, poor me), and I'm only nearing half-way through. So, that's something else I'm going to be working on. The 5th chapter's practically done, but I'm thinking of finishing that half of my homework before I post it up, that way I can focus on my homework for a little while. Don't worry, it shouldn't take that long for me to finish the "The Lord of the Flies" half. We had to do journal

entries on it, and I only need 1 and a half (out of 5) more to go. After that, hopefully sometime while I'm rereading (I already read it once during the school year) "Jane Eyre", I'll try to post up the 5th chapter. God willing, it shouldn't take that long, though, so don't worry.

So, 'till then:)

Later, y'all!! Happy 4th of July!!